

Postcards provide link to Edwardian social media

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Edwardian Postcard Project. Credit: Lancaster University

A [new public searchable database](#) provides access to a unique and inspirational treasure trove of amazing stories and pictures through what Lancaster University researchers term the 'social media' of the Edwardian era.

Described by researchers at Lancaster University as the social media of its day, with features of Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, Messenger and SMS texts, the 'hands-on' database includes 1000 postcards, written and sent between 1901 and 1910, together with transcriptions and carefully researched historical data about the people who wrote and received the fascinating cards.

Browse the database by surname, location or by year to bring the Edwardian era to life with this fascinating snapshot of the life and times.

The database has been funded through the Lancaster University Public Engagement with Research Leadership Group Fund and is part of the Edwardian Postcard Project co-directed by Director of Lancaster Literacy Research Centre and Senior Lecturer in Digital Literacies in the Department of Linguistics and English Language Dr Julia Gillen and Nigel Hall, Emeritus Professor, Manchester Metropolitan University.

"Edwardian postcards were the popular social media platform of the early twentieth century," says Dr Gillen. "Investigating the cards, we have uncovered some amazing tales and glimpses into everyday lives."

Since there were several deliveries a day (up to six times a day between 6am and 10pm in towns) cards could travel across country extraordinarily quickly through the rail network. A key communication channel, an amazing six billion cards were sent during this decade.

The super-efficient and speedy postal system in those days meant you could send a postcard from almost everywhere, even on a train.

"It really was a snapshot of what the people saw and experienced at the time," said Dr Gillen. "Postcards were used for all purposes, not just holidays, as later in the century.

People used postcards just as they use social networking platforms and text messages today. Wherever they were, they bought, commissioned or created their own artwork on postcards and sent them off in the knowledge they would reach their recipient within hours."

And the postcard enabled the writer to escape from the formal and

conventional letter writing of the day to present a much shorter, snappier style of communication – just as [social media](#) does today.

There was a wonderful variety of pictures in those days: everything from cute cats to celebrities and you could even send a selfie.

Nothing like this fast, attractive, cost-effective means of written communication existed again until the advent of digital media.

The Edwardian Postcard Project is the first project to collect, transcribe and analyse early 20th Century postcards in any significant number.

By simply tapping in a surname, address, town or year, the database throws up a snapshot of Edwardian social history.

Provided by Lancaster University

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